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U.S. TO PERSEVERE WITH IRAN MOVES, OFFICIALS REPORT

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 11 — President Reagan has decided to persevere through unpublicized Iranian contacts to seek the release of the remaining two American hostages held in Lebanon, Administration officials said today.

They said that at a high-level meeting with his aides on Monday, Mr. Reagan was advised that there was still some hope that in another week or so the hostages, Thomas M. Sutherland and Terry A. Anderson, might be freed by the pro-Iranian group that holds them.

Officials said the White House was convinced today that there is a strong enough chance for the release of these two men to warrant continued effort, but they expressed doubt that the contacts now going on could continue productively for much more than a week.

Turnabout in U.S. Policy

The decision to keep alive the effort underscores the striking turnabout in White House policy. And it came in the face of criticism here and abroad about the use of clandestine channels to Iran and collaboration with Israel in funneling American and Israeli military equipment to Iran in return for the release of three hostages.

In Rome, Prime Minister Bettino Craxi ordered a detailed inquiry into the possibility that the Italian port of Talamone was used for secret American arms shipments to Iran without the knowledge or consent of the Italian Government.

The criticism of the White House operation has produced divisions within the Administration itself, with some White House officials expressing their own dismay at the way the secret policy has been handled.

Legal Issues to Be Examined

The White House counsel was not consulted as the National Security Council directed secret dealings with Iran, according to past and present White House officials. But in the last few days the counsel, Peter J. Wallison, has begun an examination of the legal issues surrounding the affair, those officials said.

Until the secret hostage policy was

revealed in the past week, the United States had publicly opposed activities that could be construed as negotiations for the release of hostages with any nation identified with terrorists. Iran is officially listed by the State Department as supporting terrorism.

For the moment, there is uncertainty within the Administration on whether the two remaining hostages will be freed. One official said that the domestic situation in Iran was a major area of concern here, because of reports of an internal power struggle, with the contacts with the United States and Israel being used by the different factions for ammunition against each other.

The Administration drew some encouragement today from the release of two French hostages in Lebanon, and from a statement by the French Foreign Minister, Jean-Bernard Raimond, who said, "We are convinced that Iran, which has power and influence in the region, will help us."

"You have to assume that there is a dynamic toward hostage release," one official said in explaining why Washington took hope from the development.

The decision to persevere and to draw encouragement from France's dealings with Iran have underscored the major change in the Administration's approach to Iran, which was undertaken without the knowledge of almost every key official outside a few members of the National Security Council staff.

Reflecting this new approach, Richard W. Murphy, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, said today in New York after meeting with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres of Israel that "we regard Iran as a major country in the region" and that "we hope that the war which has so ravaged that country's population can be brought to an end as soon as possible." This was one of the most positive statements about Iran to be made publicly by a Reagan Administration official.

It echoed remarks made on Monday by Robert C. McFarlane, the former national security adviser, who has been reported to have been the architect of the policy of seeking contacts with

Iran. Mr. McFarlane, who has been reported to have made a secret trip to Iran this year, after leaving office, said that Iran was of "enormous importance" to the United States.

Only a few Administration officials are said to know all the details of the operation, but in the past week, following disclosures that began in a Lebanese newspaper, many in the Administration have uncovered the pertinent details.

So far, however, there has been no detailed briefing of key members of Congress. A White House official said that Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter, the national security adviser, had spoken by telephone to some Congressional leaders, but the legislators said that they had only received a general description of the situation.

A White House official said that Admiral Poindexter said there would be detailed briefings later but that at present, the sensitive nature of the channels being used prevents the Administration from giving such details.

Report in Washington Post

The Washington Post reported today that Admiral Poindexter had said that in its choice of contacts the Administration had made "a miscalculation on who it could trust in Iran." White House officials denied that he had said that.

Among those who have confirmed receiving these generalized briefings from Admiral Poindexter were Senator Richard G. Lugar, Republican of Indiana, the outgoing chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and Representative Lee H. Hamilton, Democrat of Indiana, the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. But the Senate Republican leader, Robert Dole of Kansas, and the Democratic leader, Robert C. Byrd Jr. of West Virginia, denied that they had been told anything. A White House official said that they had been on the list of those contacted by Mr. Poindexter.

The Administration, in justifying the opening to Iran, has said it was undertaken not to free hostages but to put the United States in a position to influence that country once Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini passes from the scene. There is general recognition, officials said, that the Ayatollah is not likely to moderate his fierce anti-American views.